



The presentation of colors to a packed house at the Longhorn Rodeo finals at Gaylord Entertainment Center.

Men In Blue. Horses, Too!

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In the world of walking horses, our animals often get labeled into one of two specific categories: show horse or pleasure horse. Unfortunately, it may seem to some as if we market them that way, too, as if they are good only for one or the other. All across the nation, however, there is a large contingency of folks who are proving over and over again that a walking horse is so much more. They are excelling in all disciplines and yes, even in many different careers.

Careers?

Exactly. We've brought you stories in the past of how walking horses have proven their worth as working horses. That is, horses that must work to earn their keep. Horses used solely for a very defined purpose.

The horses of Tennessee's Metropolitan Nashville Police Department Mounted Patrol are just such animals. Each day this string of Tennessee Walking Horses are groomed, saddled, bridled, and trailered to all parts of the city to assist the officers in blue, and to do their share as public servants. The patrol has become a noted Nashville institution since the horses represent the city as well as the state to thousands of people on a daily basis.

The HMP (Horse Mounted Patrol) was designed for large volumes of pedestrian traffic control for Nashville's Downtown Second Avenue District. This is an area of several square blocks in the heart of downtown Nashville full of shops, restaurants, bars, dance halls,

arcades, and the Nashville arena (home of the NHL Predators) and also the Adelphia Coliseum (home of the NFL Tennessee Titans). The District also houses such places as Hard Rock Cafe, Planet Hollywood, NASCAR Cafe, Wild Horse Saloon, Ryman Auditorium, Country Music Hall of Fame and Nashville Convention Center.

Located next to the district is the State Capital, Legislative Plaza, several large hotels and the business district of downtown all within a ten block by ten block radius. Needless to say, the traffic and parking can be a nightmare, and it is more beneficial to utilize horses for crowd control.

According to Sgt. J. D. Harber, walking horse man and commander of the mounted patrol unit, an officer sitting on a well-trained horse has several advantages over an officer who is on foot, on a bike, on motorcycle or in a car. A mounted officer in a sea of people can be seen by more than just a few. He becomes an instant deterrent to criminal activity. He can more easily spot a problem in the middle or back of a crowd than a ground officer. This allows trouble of any kind to be deterred or stopped before it reaches mass proportion.

Using this same advantage, a mounted officer can point or direct an entire crowd to move any direction because everyone sees the officer, not just the first few people in the front of the crowd. The horse and rider instantly become a beacon for people in the crowd looking for directions to a desired destination or needing medical or law enforcement assistance.



Top to bottom:

- AFC homecoming parade for the Tennessee Titans at Adelphia Stadium.
- Providing "coverage" for Titan's QB Steve McNair.
- Leading the Royal Canadian Mounted Police through the streets of Nashville.

Angry, unruly or riotous crowds are less challenging to mounted officers on horses trained for such occasions. One horse and rider is worth six to ten ground officers in these situations. The HMP is trained to work as a unit to form a wall of horses to physically push a crowd. Utilizing established techniques, officers on horse can break-up or redirect a crowd. They can also quickly infiltrate a crowd to rescue a downed officer or civilian and even effect the arrest of certain individuals who may be inciting the crowd to riot.

When ground officers make an arrest on the street or sidewalk, mounted officers become a instant blockade and open up a small area on the sidewalk or street for the officers to conduct their business whether it is a arrest or just a detainment of some kind. This keeps unwitting citizens from strolling into a potential crime scene or dangerous situation. It also blocks the view of any onlookers and

reduces the view of any unsightly but necessary action. This is welcomed by most of the business owners who want no negative publicity in front of their businesses.

Not that the mounted officers only ride, HMP officers are also highly trained professional police officers. They make arrests and perform all other police related duties just like their non-riding peers. Horse and riders are trained in arrest techniques utilizing the horses, and the officer never gets off the horse to make the arrest.

According to Sgt. Harber, the unit fulfills more than just the traditional horse patrol functions. It also gives the Police Department, business district and the community a chance to see the officers in a different light and provide positive contact with the police. Adult and child alike are genuinely drawn to the horses. The businesses on Second Avenue love for the mounted officers to ride by their stores. Tourists stop and take photo after photo of the officers and their mounts. They want to know all about the horses and the patrol.

"We are asked about the best place to eat, where to shop or see a show, and are quick to refer them to informational materials such as tour and restaurant guides and handouts we keep in our saddlebags," Harber says. "The conversations grow to include details about where the tourists are from and why they are visiting Nashville. They love to pet the horses and ask questions about them. For most, it is a spectacle to see a uniformed Police Officer on horseback. In fact, I've now learned how to say 'horse' in about 15 different languages, and still laugh to know that most of the European tourists call us cowboys!"

Harber adds that he's found the walking horse is the best breed suited for police work. "Their calm disposition and enduring patience is what's so appealing. They are also a state treasure," he says. "Once they've taken their pictures and remarked on the beauty of our walkers, they always want to know more. We're happy to obliged with a demonstration of their gaits as well as a short history lesson on the breed, and its importance to the State of Tennessee."

The Mounted Patrol has had many opportunities to show off the strengths of their unit. They routinely visits schools and other groups for demonstrations. This is a positive contact with the public that promotes the City of Nashville and the Police Department. Mounted patrol officers put on small demonstrations for local groups and performances for large audiences as well. These activities demonstrate the abilities of the horse patrol as well as entertain the public.

Recently, the mounted patrol presented the "colors" at the Nashville Speedway. "It gave us a whole new appreciation for the phrase, 'Gentlemen, start your engines'." laughed Sgt. Harber.

The patrol plays an active role in Mule Day, a highly anticipated and attended event held each year in Columbia, Tennessee. Also, each July 4th, the patrol is vital in maintaining a safety perimeter around the fireworks line at Nashville's River Front 4th of July Celebration.

And then there are those football players. The mounted patrol is always on hand at the Adelphia Coliseum where the Tennessee Titan's play football. The patrol's main duty is to keep the peace on the bridge that leads from the downtown area across the Cumberland River to the stadium. It's a perfect assignment for the horse patrol because officers have a high vantage point to spot trouble and move to it quickly. "It's hard for two drunks to fight with a horse stuck between them," says Harber.

"On one occasion the U.S. Air Force did a 'fly-by' in the pre-game ceremonies. The B1 bombers flew in very low over the bridge, right by where I was posted on my horse. They were so close I



Top to bottom:

- Mounted Officers J. D. Harber, Benny Storie, Ron Sloan, Al Murphy, Chris Hodges and Theresa Gross have recently been joined by new officers David Mizrany and Terry Watts.
- Flag presentation at Nashville Speedway
- Metro Nashville Police sponsored Horse Mounted Explorer Unit.

could see the pilot," Harber added. "My horse took it all in and did not even move when the pilot kicked in the after burners and rocked the whole bridge!"

The Mounted Patrol has also performed demonstrations at horse events such as EQUITANA USA, the Tennessee Volunteer Horse Fair, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police Musical Ride, and The Longhorn Rodeo National Finals. "We like doing demonstrations at other breed events because it's not preaching to the choir. We get a lot of converts to the breed when folks see for themselves the Tennessee Walking Horse's smooth gait and gentle disposition."

One of the unit's favorite events, which they have been at the last two years, is the Celebration in Shelbyville. "That's old-home week," says Harber.

"The horses give officers a unique perspective at any event. Our range of vision is superior to that of officers on foot or in patrol cars. Would-be troublemakers quickly hesitate when they see a thousand pound horse heading toward them."

Sgt. Harber says there are many considerations when a department wants to create a mounted unit. The major one is the cost. Most Police Departments are run on a shoestring budget, and the purchase of quality horses and all equipment needed can be considerable. That doesn't even scratch the surface when it comes to feeding, stabling and care of the horses.

Fortunately, many such problems can be solved with a little help from the business community and the public. The patrol actively recruits the donation of quality horses. "Members of the TWHBEA have been very good to our department," says Harber. "We're very fortunate in that regard."

Another issue is quality staff. The Mounted Patrol is not all fun and games. On the contrary, if done correctly it is a lot of hard work and dedication is a must. All horses must be groomed and cleaned daily. This entails everything from stall maintenance (shoveling manure, replacing bedding, fixing what was kicked, chewed or squashed the night before) to feeding (no matter if you are working or not, they still have to eat) to health care. These type duties fall on the responsibility of the riders. It will not matter if you stall at an existing horse barn with stable hands who actually do the work. Ultimately it is the rider who will be seen on the horse and who will have to hear any complaints from the public on the horse's appearance and care.

Also, training is continuous. It never stops. Officers and horses need constant saddle time. "If you do not use it you will lose it". That is why a full time program is desired over a part time program. This is extremely important when dealing with large amounts of crowds and traffic.

Sgt. Harber adds that it is important to select the right officers. "Our original officers were chosen for their abilities and attitude. I'm a horse trainer and a police instructor. Officer Gross has an equestrian background and looks sharp on a horse. Officers Sloan and Storie were canine officers and have carpenter and woodworking abilities. Officer Murphy is a seasoned investigator from the Youth Guidance Division. And, Officer Hodges is a police cyclist instructor and has knowledge of putting together new community policing programs. We put together a great team to get the unit under way."

This "great team" he speaks of has also earned distinction around the country by become a training mecca for other police departments in Mounted Patrol Tactics. The unit has hosted numerous agencies from around the southern United States and assisted in setting up and starting mounted units from around the United States and Canada. They've even had one request for assistance from Israel!

Harber is responsible for the patrol's training. He has an extensive background in training horses and did so professionally before he was a police officer. He has been certified by the state as an instructor in mounted patrol tactics. He focuses on training both the horse and rider, then allowing officers to become trainers as well. This provides the unit with not only a Master Trainer but others who can train and assist in training classes as well.

"The first advice we give them is you got to have the right horse," states Sgt. Harber. "As far as I'm concerned, the right horse is the Tennessee Walking Horse!"

Whose gonna' argue with a policeman?

— Vicki Mazzola